



WHITMAN  
COLLEGE



NATIVE AMERICAN OUTREACH  
(titóqanim wapáyatat)

# Home in Páşxapa Walking Tour

Explore significant spots in the founding  
of Walla Walla and Whitman College





## Historical Background

Páŝxapa, meaning Place of the Wild Sunflowers, is the Cayuse name for the Walla Walla Valley. The Cayuse (Weyíletpu), along with the Umatilla (Imatalamáma), and Walla Walla (Walúulapam) tribes, have inhabited the Columbia River region in southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon for over 10,000 years.

Prior to the arrival of Euro-American settlers, the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people traveled on the Columbia Plateau, setting up seasonal camps to participate in annual cycles of hunting, fishing, trading and celebration. The region's natural resources supported the tribes as they gathered roots and berries, hunted elk and deer, and fished salmon.

### Settlers Arrive

In 1818, the North West Company established a fort, called Fort Nez Percés (or Fort Nez Perce), at the confluence of the Walla Walla and Columbia rivers. In the 1820s, French Canadian Métis arrived in the Walla Walla Valley. The Cayuse and Walla Walla directed

where they could settle and allowed them to marry into local tribes.

In the 1830s, white Christian missionaries came to convert local tribes to Christianity. Presbyterian missionaries Marcus and Narcissa (Prentiss) Whitman established a mission at Weyíletpu (west of present-day College Place; also spelled Waiilatpu) in October 1836, which became a key stop on the Oregon Trail as settler-colonist traveled westward.

The Whitmans' arrival proved disastrous; the settlers refused to pay for the land, and Marcus, a medical doctor, failed to mitigate the effects of disease wrought by immigrants on the Oregon Trail. A measles epidemic in 1847

devastated the tribes, and rumors spread that Marcus was poisoning the Cayuse.

The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla felt the devastating impacts of the settlers' arrival in the region by the mid-18th century as disease and death adversely affected the tribes and interfered with traditional tribal lifeways. Rising tensions escalated into conflict and in late November 1847, a band of Cayuse attacked the Weyíletpu Mission, killing the Whitmans and 12 others.

### The Treaty Era

The results of the events at Weyíletpu led to several years of conflict known as the Cayuse War (1847–1855) and contributed to calls to formalize U.S. government control of the region. The Oregon Territory was incorporated in 1848, and the Territory of Washington was formed out of a portion of that land in 1853. Congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 encouraging white settlement in the West, further inflaming tensions between settlers and local tribes.

On May 29, 1855, representatives of the U.S. government met with regional tribal representatives in Walla Walla for a treaty council to negotiate an end to the conflict. The outcome of the Treaty of 1855 for the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla tribes was the establishment of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, ceding 6.4 million acres for a 510,000-acre reservation on Cayuse homeland. The tribes were prevented from continuing their traditional lifeways and were systematically relocated, sometimes by force, to the reservation.

### The Whitman Myth

The Whitman Myth, that Whitman was a benevolent martyr who saved Oregon Territory, began developing shortly following the events at Weyíletpu. The story came to national attention in 1871 when missionary colleague Henry Spalding persuaded the U.S. Senate to print a pamphlet claiming that Whitman had traveled by horse across the country in 1842 to warn President John Tyler

of a British, Catholic and Native American plot to "steal" Oregon. He also claimed that the British and Catholics had persuaded the Cayuse to kill Whitman. In fact, Whitman's 1842 trip back East was in response to orders from his missionary organization to close the mission at Weyíletpu due to dissension and infighting among the missionaries.

### Whitman College

Whitman College was originally established in 1859 by colleagues of the Whitmans as a seminary named in their honor. In 1883, Whitman became a nonsectarian, four-year degree-granting higher education institution while continuing to benefit reputationally and financially from the association with the Whitman name. This was particularly true during the 1894–1934 tenure of President Stephen Penrose, whose 1895 fundraising brochure "The Romance of a College" calls Whitman "the greatest hero of the Pacific Coast." Long-standing college references to its namesake include use of the Missionaries as its mascot and a school newspaper called The Pioneer, both of which were changed in the 2010s as the college reckoned with its history and relationship to the Whitman Myth.

In 2017 Whitman College and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation signed a Memorandum of Agreement, which was reaffirmed in 2022. Together, they are working to heal the generational pain caused by centuries of injustice, improve access to and success in higher education for Native American students, and honor the Indigenous people of the region as the original stewards of this land.

**Photo:** "Fourth of July Celebration at Cayuse, OR, With Teepees". WCMss749. Métis Families of the Columbia River Plateau Collection, Lavadour Family Photographs. Whitman College and Northwest Archives.



## Kay Nielsen's “The Whitman Legend”



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### Context

Commissioned by a Whitman alum and painted by Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen in 1956–1957, “The Whitman Legend” illustrates a mythologized version of the story of the Whitman Mission that minimizes Indigenous presence and justifies settler claims to the land. The mural hung in Whitman College’s Memorial Hall for more than half a century before it was moved to its current location in Maxey Hall West in 2007.

The 96-inch-by-130-inch mural depicts several episodes of the story tinged with the visual vocabulary of Manifest Destiny: A wagon train makes its way through the wilderness toward the mission where settlers have carved out a utopian domesticated agricultural sphere. Whitman, cast as a humble knight, kneels under a canopy of trees, surrounded by faceless Indians shrouded in darkness as he heroically attempts to save a life. A broad sunbeam

pierces the clouds, bathing Fort Walla Walla and the grave of Marcus and Narcissa in light and bringing forth new life as wildflowers bloom. Whitman rides east over the mountains toward Washington, D.C., a lone horseman battling the wilds in winter weather, heroically facing the demonic forces arrayed against the spread of Christianity and American supremacy in the West.

In popular culture, the Whitman Myth had petered out by the time of this painting. However, the legendary version of Whitman as a national hero has lingered longer in Walla Walla and at Whitman College, whose founders and fundraisers played a major role in its formation, and where the origin story continued to hold sway long after Marcus Whitman’s national historical importance waned. This painting and other memorials bear witness to the city’s and the college’s ongoing and fraught entanglement with the myth.

### Consider

- As you view the picture, think about your awareness and knowledge of the Whitmans and about the history of the local tribes. In what ways would a nonmythologized painting differ from this mural?
- How can you contribute to sharing history in ways that honor Indigenous culture, knowledge, heritage and existence as a sovereign nation of the United States?



# Treaty Rock



## Context

The exact location of the 1855 treaty council is unknown but was documented to be along the north bank of Mill Creek. Given that participants from multiple tribes as well as the U.S. government representatives numbered in the thousands, the camps were likely spread out over a large area, including land that is currently part of Whitman College and adjacent neighborhoods.

This monument at the entrance of the Whitman College amphitheatre consists of two metal plaques inset on opposite sides of a large rock. The first was installed in 1930, recognizing this as the location of the campgrounds of the Nez Perce during the treaty council. The second plaque was gifted by the people of the Yakama, Nez Perce,

Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla tribes in 1955 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of 1855. These plaques are written records of the importance of this land in shaping the lives of the tribes who historically called this area home.

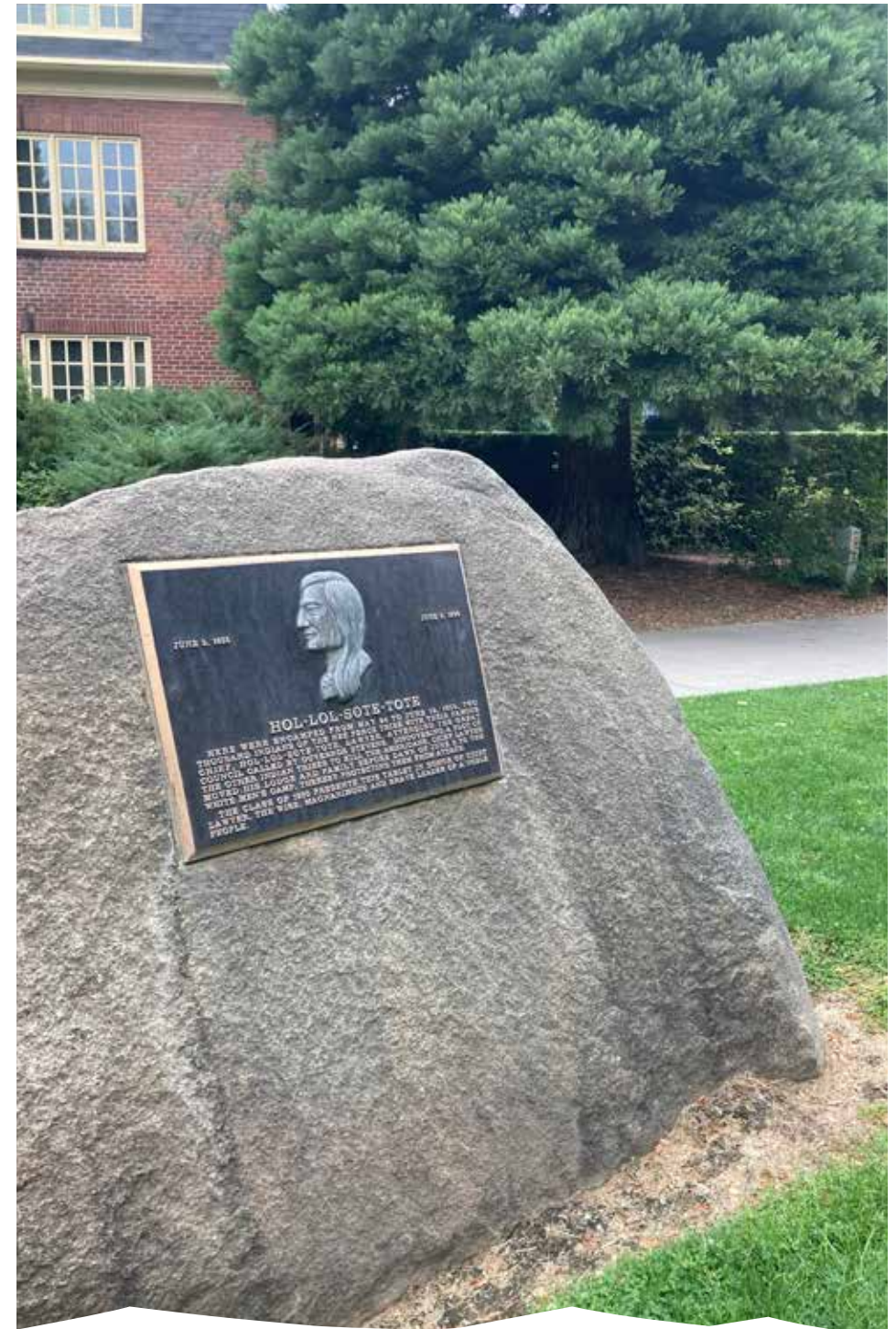
In recent years, many entities, including Whitman College, have adopted the practice of sharing land acknowledgments as a way of recognizing the historical and current presence of Native Americans. Land acknowledgments state that specific areas are the traditional homelands of Native American people and that these lands were ceded to the U.S. government and negotiated at a nation-to-nation level, as tribal nations remain sovereign within the United States.

## Whitman College Land Acknowledgment

Whitman College is located on the traditional Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla homelands. We pay our respect to tribal elders both past and present and extend our respect to all Indigenous people today. We honor their stewardship of the land and ecosystem and commit to continuing that important work.

## Consider

- What is a land acknowledgment and what does that mean to you? Is it enough to share a land acknowledgment on a webpage, in an email or aloud at public events?
- What more could be done by individuals and by institutions to honor tribal people, their history, and their national sovereignty?







## Marcus Whitman Statue



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### Context

This statue, a copy of the original created by sculptor Avard T. Fairbanks in 1953, depicts missionary doctor Marcus Whitman as a frontiersman in a buckskin outfit typical of fur trappers. While no confirmed images of Whitman exist, a team of local researchers believe that the statue does not accurately depict him but instead presents a symbolic representation of frontier mythology. The original statue was gifted by the state of Washington to the National Statuary Hall Collection in Washington, D.C., and a second copy resides at the state capitol building.

In recent years, communities in the United States have been reckoning with monuments that commemorate and celebrate the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Following successful passage of

state legislation in 2021, the Whitman statue at the National Statuary Hall will be removed in 2025 and replaced by a statue of Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually tribal member and activist for environmental protections and treaty rights who died in 2014.

The statue in Walla Walla belongs to the city and is placed on Whitman College land. Following several years of community discussion about Whitman and the impact he had on regional history, the Walla Walla Arts Commission unanimously recommended in a nonbinding statement that the statue be relocated. This suggestion was denied in June 2023 by the Walla Walla City Council, who cited the need for further stakeholder input.

### Consider

- What are the multiple layers of history encapsulated in this monument?
- As you consider Whitman's role in founding a mission and later leading thousands of settlers into the Walla Walla Valley, how does the presence of this statue impact your experience of the space around it?



# Treaty Placard



## Context

This marker, placed by the Narcissa Prentiss Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1925 at the Carnegie Building, was the first memorial in Walla Walla to commemorate the signing of the Treaty of 1855, a pivotal moment that led to extreme loss for the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla tribes.

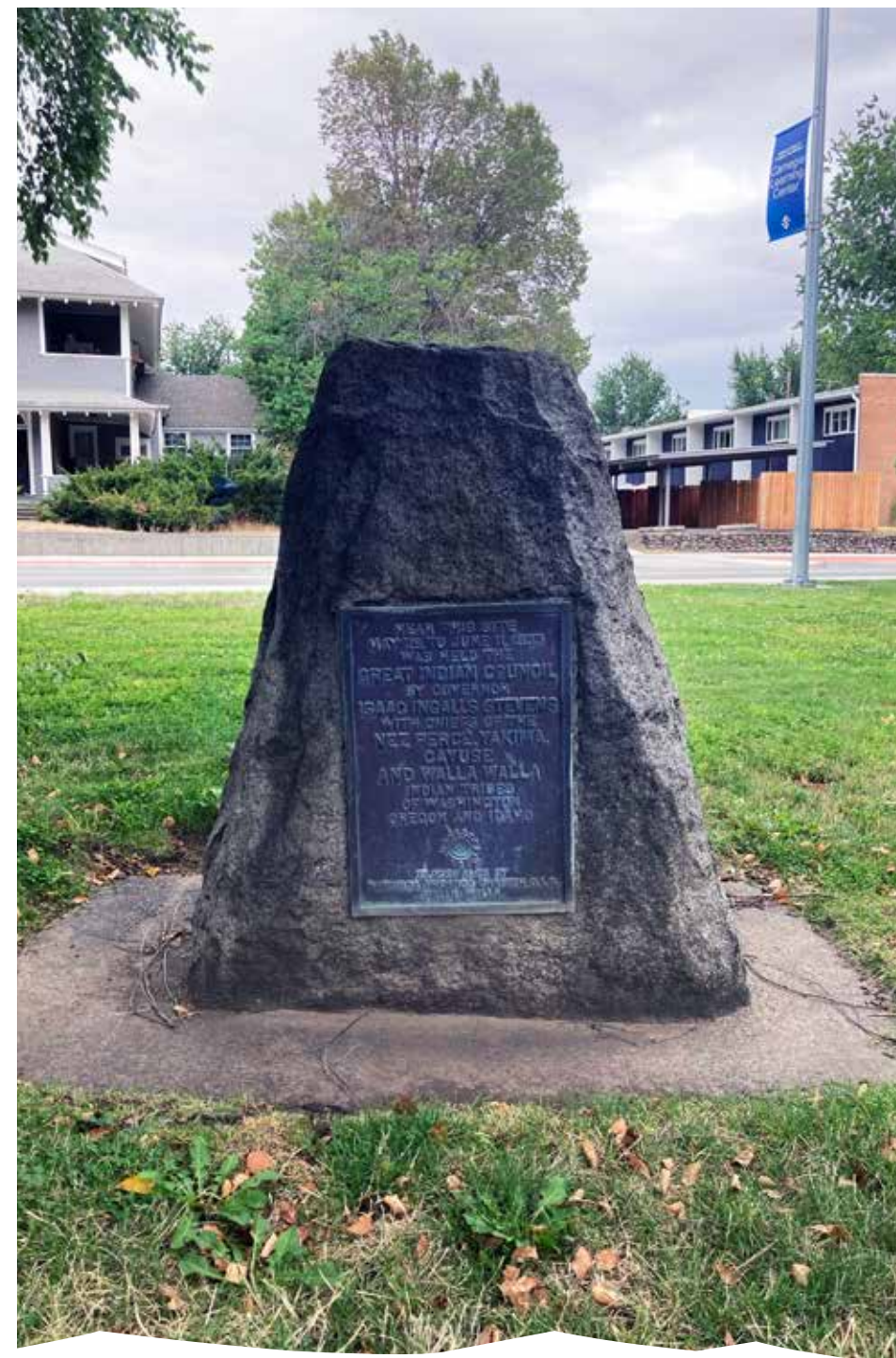
Following the signing of treaties, tribes have continuously pushed the U.S. government to stand by the agreements. However, after the Treaty of 1855, further acts of Congress reduced the original 510,000-acre reservation and opened it up for white settlers, creating a checkerboarded reservation. Today the Umatilla Indian Reservation is 172,882 acres, of which 52% is in Native ownership and 48% is owned by non-Natives.

Other treaty agreements related to tribal lifeways, such as the right to hunt, fish and gather food on nonreservation lands, have also been broken through government and settler actions. For instance, ancient usual and accustomed fishing locations along the river became inaccessible or made useless; in the case of the Umatilla River, the salmon were made extinct by irrigation and reclamation efforts as early as 1914.

Today, Native American tribes keep the treaties at the forefront of communication and collaboration with local communities and government entities in order to maintain Indigenous presence and stewardship over their remaining lands and rights.

## Consider

- As you view this placard and the additional historical information sign, consider the history of the treaties. How might the results of the Treaty of 1855 be understood differently by Native American tribes than by those who placed this marker?
- What has been the lasting impact of the Treaty of 1855 on the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla tribes?





## Memorial Building Panel (South Entrance)



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### Context

Whitman College is taking steps to actively repair damage caused by the Whitman Myth, which not only played a key role in the formation of this college but also perpetuates the settler-colonist mindset and erases Indigenous perspectives. This large marble panel next to the Boyer Street entrance of Memorial Building, given by a donor in 1899, is one example of a public honor of the Whitmans embedded into the most historic building on campus.

Within its strategic plan developed in 2023, the college states that it seeks to engage substantially with its history in ways that are honest and reparative to those harmed, fully realizing the commitments of

the college's Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). Some key items of the MOA include funding opportunities for joint research with the CTUIR, developing educational courses that include local tribal history and culture, and enhancing access and support for Native American students.

Moving away from the Whitman Myth and toward meaningful relationships with local tribes is a result of long-term collaboration between college students, faculty and staff, community members of the CTUIR, and residents of the Walla Walla Valley.

### Consider

- As you contemplate the Memorial Building panel, what aspects of the Whitman Myth does it support?
- What could the college as an institution do to bring out a more honest truth that is authentically representative of and reparative to our local tribes?



# Whitman College and Northwest Archives



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## Context

The Whitman College and Northwest Archives houses materials documenting the history and culture of Whitman College and the Walla Walla region from the mid-1800s to the present day. Located on the ground floor of Penrose Library, the archives houses information related to several Home in Páŕŕapa Walking Tour sites, including Treaty Rock and the Marcus Whitman statue. It is a resource for investigating any aspect of local or institutional history you are curious about.

The archives also manages an extensive online collection of digitized materials, including items belonging to Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and other early settlers, as well as the Lavadour Family Photographs, which document a century in the life of an

extensive Métis (mixed Native American and French Canadian) family in the Walla Walla Valley and on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

In 2023, the Special Assistant to the President for Native American Outreach and the archives staff started discussions around creating the Páŕŕapa Project to dedicate a central location for developing a full inventory of archival information and materials related to the CTUIR and other regional tribes for educational, cultural, and informational purposes in a manner that protects and preserves this information and materials for tribal communities and their future generations.

## Archives Contact Information

Email: [archives@whitman.edu](mailto:archives@whitman.edu)

Phone: 509-527-5922

Website: [library.whitman.edu/archives](http://library.whitman.edu/archives)

## Consider

- Who decides what pieces of history are saved in archives and museums? How does this affect what we know or don't know about the past?
- What might records from today look like in the future?
- How do we define an archive? Is it found only within institutions, or can personal or community collections of documents and photographs be defined as an archive?

## For More Information

### Books

- “Wiyáxayxt/As Days Go By/Wiyáakaa’awn”  
edited by Jennifer Karson
- “Lewis and Clark Through Indian Eyes”  
edited by Alvin M. Josephy Jr.
- “Murder at the Mission: A Frontier Killing, Its Legacy of Lies, and the Taking of the American West”  
by Blaine Harden

### Websites

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation**  
[ctuir.org](http://ctuir.org)
- Walla Walla City Government**  
[wallawallawa.gov/our-city/history](http://wallawallawa.gov/our-city/history)
- Whitman College Native American Outreach**  
[whitman.edu/nativeamerican](http://whitman.edu/nativeamerican)

## Places to Visit

### Tamástslikt Cultural Institute

[tamastslitk.org](http://tamastslitk.org)

### Whitman Mission National Historic Site

[nps.gov/whmi](http://nps.gov/whmi)

### Fort Walla Walla Museum

[fwwm.org](http://fwwm.org)

### Frenchtown Historic Site

[frenchtownwa.org](http://frenchtownwa.org)



